

MIND MATTERS: A LOOK INTO THE MENTAL HEALTH OF NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY (NEHU) POSTGRADUATES

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Abstract

This study investigates the mental health status of postgraduate students at North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong. The research aims to identify the prevalence of mental health issues, compare mental health across various demographics (gender, community, caste, locality, age), and suggest innovative strategies to enhance the mental well-being of students. Findings reveal that a significant portion of NEHU postgraduate students are experiencing mental health challenges, with anxiety, depression, and stress being prevalent. Factors such as gender, community, caste, locality, and age influence mental health outcomes. The study emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support services at NEHU, including counselling, workshops, and accessible healthcare resources. Implementing proactive measures to address mental health can create a more conducive learning environment, improve academic performance, and enhance the overall well-being of NEHU postgraduate students.

Keywords: Mind Matters, Mental health of Postgraduate students, North-Eastern Hill University, and wellbeing.

Introduction

Mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It's reflected in our ability to cope with life's challenges and participate fully in our communities. People with good mental health can make informed decisions, harness their strengths, and engage meaningfully with others. A person's mental health is affected by their thought, feelings, and behaviours. Keeping one's mental health can be achieved by increasing one's social interactions with family and friends. When you feel lonely, try to distract yourself and try not to think negatively because this might hurt your mental health. Talk to the person you feel connected to about your issue, this will reduce your mental health (Holmes, 2023). Focus on self-care, good habits, stress management, creating positive relationships, setting boundaries, getting professional help, practising mindfulness, balancing responsibilities, keeping a positive attitude and continuing education to maintain mental health (Holmes, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The well-being of students is paramount to any educational institution. North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), a leading university in Northeast India, is located in the educational hub of Shillong. Research indicates a strong correlation between mental health and student academic success. This study, titled “Mind Matters: A Look into the Mental Health of NEHU Postgraduates”, aims to investigate the mental health status of postgraduate students at NEHU.

Research Questions of the Study

The investigator formulated the following research questions:

1. What is the status of the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students of North-Eastern Hill University?
2. Is there any difference between male and female Postgraduate Students' Mental Health?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a mentally healthy person?

Objectives of the Study

The investigator formulated the following research objectives:

1. To find out the status of the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students at North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU).
2. To compare the mental health status of postgraduate students in NEHU by
 - i. Sex
 - ii. Community
 - iii. Tribe- Non-tribe
 - iv. Rural-Urban
 - v. Age
3. To suggest innovative ways to improve the mental health of postgraduate students at NEHU.
4. To find out the advantages of a mentally healthy person and disadvantages of a Mentally unhealthy person.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitation involves defining the boundaries of a research study, often influenced by its limitations. In this study, delimitation is used to specify the target population and the scope of the research findings. It's important to recognize that a single study cannot cover every aspect of a complex topic. The study is delimited to:

1. North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong campus only.
2. All the Postgraduate Students except professional students of the law department.
3. For the academic year 2023-24.

Review of Literature

Several studies have explored the mental health of university students, examining factors such as prevalence, gender disparities, academic performance, structural conditions, and particularly those studying abroad.

Niehaus et al. (2022) investigated how faculty-led study abroad programs can support student mental health. Raid et al. (2022) examined the mental health impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Central European students. Hoffswell (2022) focused on developing faculty training to address mental health issues in study abroad programs. Zhao et al. (2022) analyzed factors influencing the mental health of Chinese students studying domestically or abroad. Dessauvagie et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of mental health in Southeast Asian university students. Poyrazli et al. (2020) studied mental health problems among U.S. students

studying abroad in Italy. Briscoe et al. (2020) examined the role of mental health issues in faculty-led short-term study abroad programs. Clark (2019) advocated for an equitable approach to addressing mental health in U.S. study-abroad programs. Harrer et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of internet interventions for mental health in university students. Doki et al. (2018) investigated the stress experienced by foreign-born staff members. Browne et al. (2017) focused on the mental health of Australian university students, highlighting the need for support during the critical transition period. Worfel et al. (2015) investigated anxiety and depression among German university students, finding that these conditions were more prevalent in certain genders, study years, and academic fields. Hyun et al. (2014) focused on the psychological adjustment of Korean students studying abroad alone, highlighting the importance of support for unaccompanied minors. Macaskill (2013) examined the relationship between educational involvement and mental health issues among UK university students. Markoulakis et al. (2013) identified three key challenges faced by students with mental health problems: internal, external, and academic. Furnham et al. (2011) explored mental health literacy among university students, finding that emotional intelligence was associated with better knowledge. Ryan et al. (2010) investigated the psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation of international students in Ireland. Jafari et al. (2010) examined the relationship between spiritual well-being and mental health among university students. Uner et al. (2008) assessed the mental health of university students using the GHQ-12. Bramesfeld et al. (2003) compared various approaches to mental health promotion and prevention in different regions.

These studies provide valuable insights into the mental health challenges faced by university students, particularly those studying abroad, and offer recommendations for improving support services.

Multiple studies have highlighted the prevalence of mental health issues among Indian college students.

Cherian et al. (2024) found high rates of suicidal ideation, attempts, and mental health conditions among Indian college students. Handa et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of mental health for a fulfilling life and discussed the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017. Velagapaly and Bolla (2023) explored the relationship between mental health, well-being, and academic performance in Telangana. Joseph et al. (2022) evaluated a state-wide college mental health program in Kerala, identifying the need for expanded services. Wasil et al. (2022) investigated student perspectives on improving mental health on college campuses. Sanghvi et al. (2022) reviewed technology-based interventions for mental health help-seeking. Chaudhary et al. (2021) examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of Indian college students. Srivastava et al. (2021) explored the relationship between internet addiction and mental health among Indian university students. Deb et al. (2020) studied the association between happiness, meaning, satisfaction, and spirituality among Indian university students. Cherubal et al. (2019) reviewed the impact of physical activity on mental health in India. Kunari et al. (2019) evaluated a digital mental health intervention for Indian college students. Barman et al. (2018) investigated the use of social networking sites and mental health among medical students. Sravani et al. (2018) examined depression, anxiety, and stress among undergraduate dental students.

Aggarwal et al. (2016) studied knowledge, attitudes, and social distancing practices towards mental illness among young undergraduates. Bhola et al. (2016) assessed emotional and behavioral difficulties among pre-university college students. Deb et al. (2016) explored the relationship between depression and academic environment, living arrangements, and personal issues. Kumar et al. (2016) examined stress, anxiety, and depression levels among medical students. Sharad et al. (2015) investigated the effect of Suryanamaskar on relaxation among college students. Shashidhar et al. (2014) studied the perception of psychiatry as a career choice among medical students. Prabhu et al. (2014) examined stress among university students in India. These studies collectively highlight the pressing need for comprehensive mental health support services for Indian college students.

Education is a cornerstone of societal development, and it's interconnected with health. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided valuable lessons. While numerous studies have explored mental health, particularly among students, there's a lack of research specifically focusing on North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) students. Given the importance of mental health and the unique context of NEHU, this study aims to investigate the mental health of postgraduate students at this institution.

Population and Sample of the Study

As per NEHU annual report (2023), the total number of PG students in NEHU was 2928. The investigator used a simple random sampling technique to collect data from 250 PG students.

Method and Procedure of Data Collection

To gather data from 250 postgraduate students, the investigator obtained permission from their supervisors. The investigator visited each department personally, requesting the class representatives to distribute questionnaires to students and collect them within a specified timeframe. Before distribution, students were provided with clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and encouraged to answer all questions honestly. The investigator visited each department twice to distribute questionnaires and collect completed responses.

Scoring Guidelines for the Mental Health Questionnaire

The Mental Health Questionnaire is a 35-item (Part-A), 3-point scale questionnaire designed to measure anxiety, depression, attention problems, and conduct problems. Each item has three response options: Never, Sometimes, and Often.

Scoring:

- Never: 0 points
- Sometimes: 1 point
- Often: 2 points

Interpretation:

- Students scoring 28 or above: Indicative of mental impairment.
- Students scoring below 28: Considered mentally healthy.

Part B of the mental health questionnaire has 7 closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Techniques of Data Analysis

The investigator used simple percentages for quantitative data analysis and content analysis for qualitative data analysis

Method of the Study

The investigator used a descriptive method for the present study.

Results and Discussions

Objective-1: To find out the status of the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students at North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU).

S. No.	Statement	Response N (%)			
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Total
1	Complain of aches or pains	41 (16.4%)	170 (68.0%)	38 (15.2%)	250 (100%)
2	Spend more time alone	26 (10.4%)	116 (46.4%)	108 (43.2%)	250 (100%)
3	Tire easily, little energy	51 (20.4%)	141 (56.4%)	58 (23.2%)	250 (100%)
4	Fidgety, unable to sit still	83 (33.2%)	117 (46.8%)	50 (20%)	250 (100%)
5	Have trouble with the teacher	91 (36.4%)	120 (48.0%)	39 (15.6%)	250 (100%)
6	Less interested in school/college	81 (32.4%)	131 (52.4%)	38 (15.2%)	250 (100%)
7	Act as if driven by a motor	130 (52.0%)	96 (38.4%)	24 (9.6%)	250 (100%)
8	Daydream too much	50 (20.0%)	121 (48.4%)	79 (31.6%)	250 (100%)
9	Distract easily	29 (11.6%)	133 (53.2%)	88 (35.2%)	250 (100%)
10	Are afraid of new situations	62 (24.8%)	126 (50.4%)	62 (24.8%)	250 (100%)

S. No.	Statement	Response N (%)			
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Total
11	Feel sad, unhappy	33 (13.2%)	181 (72.4%)	36 (14.4%)	250 (100%)
12	Are irritable angry	32 (12.8%)	167 (66.8%)	51 (20.4%)	250 (100%)
13	Feel hopeless	43 (17.2%)	160 (64.0%)	47 (18.8%)	250 (100%)
14	Have trouble concentrating	25 (10.0%)	154 (61.6%)	71 (28.4%)	250 (100%)
15	Less interested in friends	113 (45.2%)	114 (45.6%)	23 (9.2%)	250 (100%)
16	Fight with other children	157 (62.8%)	74 (29.6%)	19 (7.6%)	250 (100%)
17	Absent from school/college	63 (25.2%)	154 (61.6%)	33 (13.2%)	250 (100%)
18	School/college grades dropping	84 (33.6%)	119 (47.6%)	47 (18.8%)	250 (100%)
19	Down on yourself	69 (27.6%)	141 (56.4%)	40 (16.0%)	250 (100%)
20	Visit doctor with doctor finding nothing wrong	165 (66.0%)	56 (22.4%)	29 (11.6%)	250 (100%)
21	Have trouble sleeping	64 (25.6%)	139 (55.6%)	47 (18.8%)	250 (100%)

S. No.	Statement	Response N (%)			
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Total
22	Worry a lot	38 (15.2%)	137 (54.8%)	75 (30%)	250 (100%)
23	Want to be with parent more than before	42 (16.8%)	103 (41.2%)	105 (42.0%)	250 (100%)
24	Feel that you are bad	66 (26.4%)	141 (56.4%)	43 (17.2%)	250 (100%)
25	Take unnecessary risks	79 (31.6%)	138 (55.2%)	33 (13.2%)	250 (100%)
26	Get hurt frequently	69 (27.6%)	139 (55.6%)	42 (16.8%)	250 (100%)
27	Seem to be having less fun	66 (26.4%)	146 (58.4%)	38 (15.2%)	250 (100%)
28	Act younger than children your age	100 (40.0%)	106 (42.4%)	44 (17.6%)	250 (100%)
29	Do not listen to rules	87 (34.8%)	135 (54.0%)	28 (11.2%)	250 (100%)
30	Do not show feelings	52 (20.8%)	147 (58.8%)	51 (20.4%)	250 (100%)
31	Do not understand other people's feelings	90 (36.0%)	126 (50.4%)	34 (13.6%)	250 (100%)
32	Tease others	86 (34.4%)	106 (42.4%)	58 (23.2%)	250 (100%)

S. No.	Statement	Response N (%)			
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Total
33	Blame other for your troubles	165 (66.0%)	71 (28.4%)	14 (5.6%)	250 (100%)
34	Take things that do not belong to you	189 (75.6%)	54 (21.6%)	7 (2.8%)	250 (100%)
35	Refuse to share	107 (42.8%)	123 (49.2%)	20 (8.0%)	250 (100%)

Overall status of Mental Health of Postgraduate Students at NEHU, Shillong

S. No.	Level of Mental Health Score	Frequency	Per cent (%)	Status of Mental Health
1	Up to 27	92	36.8%	Mentally Healthy
2	28 and above	158	63.2%	Mentally Impaired
Total		250	100%	

From the above table, it was found that 36.8% of Postgraduate Students at NEHU, Shillong are Mentally Healthy; whereas 63.2% of Postgraduate Students at NEHU, Shillong are Mentally Impaired. The results show that 2/3 of Postgraduate Students in NEHU Shillong have Mentally related issues. This may be one of the reasons for COVID-19. The NEHU administration should take the matter seriously to keep all the Students Mentally Healthy.

Objective-2: To compare the status of the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students at NEHU by

- vi. Sex
- vii. Community
- viii. Tribe- Non tribe
- ix. Rural-Urban
- x. Age

The investigator provided detailed information on the status of the Mental Health of Postgraduate Students at NEHU, Shillong in the table below (Comparison Table).

S. No.	Variable		Status of Mental Health N (%)			
			Mentally Healthy	Mentally Impaired	Total	Grand Total
1	Sex	Male	54 (21.6)	62 (24.8)	116	250
		Female	38 (15.2)	96 (38.4)	158	
2	Community	Christian	74 (29.6)	124 (49.6)	198	250
		Non- Christian	18 (7.2)	34 (13.6)	52	
3	Caste	Tribe	74 (29.6)	133 (53.2)	207	250
		Non-Tribe	18 (7.2)	25 (10)	43	
4	Locality	Rural	51 (20.4)	97 (38.8)	148	250
		Urban	41 (16.4)	61 (24.4)	102	
5	Age	Up to 23years	60 (24)	115 (46)	175	250
		24 years and above	32 (12.8)	43 (17.2)	75	

Based on the data, a higher percentage of male postgraduate students (21.6%) were identified as mentally healthy compared to female students (15.2%). Regarding community, Christian students (29.6%) had higher rates of mental health compared to non-Christian students (7.2%). Similarly, tribal students (29.6%) demonstrated higher mental health compared to non-tribal students (7.2%). In terms of locality, rural students (20.4%) had slightly higher rates of mental health compared to urban students (16.4%). Age-wise, students under 23 years old (24%) had higher rates of mental health compared to those 24 years and older (12.8%). A significant portion of postgraduate students in all categories (gender, community, caste, locality, and age) were identified as having mental health impairments.

Objective-3: To suggest innovative ways to improve the mental health of postgraduate students at NEHU.

To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher gathered data from 250 postgraduate students at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The following innovative strategies were identified to promote the mental health of postgraduate students:

1. Adequate sleep
2. Always active in sports
3. Always think positive
4. Avoid stress
5. Avoid toxic people
6. Avoid unnecessary conversation
7. Be confidence
8. Be kind
9. Be more active in sports
10. Be more socialize
11. Be positivity
12. Being able to communicate with people
13. Being optimistic all the time
14. By doing creativity arts
15. By doing house shore
16. Camping
17. Clean the house
18. Communicate with others
19. Concentrate on myself
20. Connecting with others
21. Conversing daily with family
22. Try to avoid negativity thought
23. Try to connect with friends
24. Try to socialize
25. Wake up early in the morning
26. Watch motivational movies
27. Work on myself
28. Yoga

Objective-4: To find out the advantages of a mentally healthy person and disadvantages of a Mentally unhealthy person.

The investigator collected data from 250 Postgraduate Students in NEHU to fulfil the present objective. The advantages and disadvantages of a mentally healthy person are given below.

The advantages of a Mentally Healthy person:

1. More lively and joyful
2. Take better decisions-
3. Positive attitude and outlook-
4. Ability to handle situations well
5. Contribute to the society
6. Emotionally resilient
7. Discipline
8. Successful in life
9. Strong minded person
10. Good feelings
11. Dedication towards goals
12. Help reduce stress
13. Enhanced resilience
14. Improved quality of life
15. Improve physical health
16. Good performance in class
17. Take decision more correctly
18. Higher quality of life
19. Adapt in a society
20. Solve problem
21. Think straight in any situation
22. Free from stress depression
23. Healthy mind
24. Adversity and life challenges
25. Maintain healthier connections
26. Initiate
27. Feeling great in life
28. Contribute to the society effectively
29. Calm and content
30. Confident and satisfied in life

The disadvantages of a Mentally Unhealthy person:

1. Worry a lot
2. Distracted easily
3. Low self esteem
4. Unable to concentrate
5. No desire
6. Neglecting self-care
7. Unhealthy
8. Overthink
9. Depressed

10. Feeling hopeless
11. Feeling unhappy
12. Isolate themselves to others
13. Anxiety
14. Having suicide thought
15. Unstable life
16. Low performance
17. Become addict
18. Lost interest
19. Unreasonable
20. Negative thought
21. Danger to the society
22. Pessimistic and low energy
23. Disturbing problem
24. Unable to communicate
25. Get ill easily
26. Reduced productivity
27. Can't memorize properly
28. Stigma
29. Limited access to resources
30. Feel lonely
31. Not getting proper sleep
32. Feel hopeless
33. Can't interact with people
34. Unemployment
35. Limited opportunities for training
36. Not taking good care of ourselves
37. Lack of attention
38. Poor quality of life
39. Family history
40. Use of alcohol and drug
41. They don't have confidence
42. Social isolation

Educational Implications of the Study

Educational Implications of the Findings on Mental Health of NEHU PG Students

The study reveals a significant concern regarding the mental health of postgraduate (PG) students at NEHU. Here's a breakdown of the findings and their educational implications:

Implications:

- Promote physical activity: Encourage participation in sports or guided exercise Programmes to improve physical well-being and potentially reduce aches, fatigue, and excessive daydreaming.
- Improve access to healthcare: Ensure easy access to healthcare services, including physical and mental health professionals, for students who need them.

- Nutritional counseling: Consider workshops or resources on healthy eating habits to address potential dietary issues contributing to fatigue.
- Foster a sense of community: Organize events and activities that encourage interaction and build a supportive social network among students.
- Improve faculty-student relationships: Promote open communication channels and address any teacher-student issues promptly.
- Enhance teaching methods: Incorporate more engaging and interactive teaching methods to increase student interest and participation.

By addressing the educational implications highlighted above, NEHU can create a more supportive and healthy learning environment for its PG students. Prioritizing mental health through a combination of preventive and support measures is crucial for student well-being and academic success.

Suggestions for Further Study

The investigator has tried her best to measure the Mental Health of PG Students in NEHU by covering some of the independent variables. It is not possible to cover each and everything under the same study. The investigator has the following suggestions for further study. They are:

- i. The same study can be conducted at the elementary education level.
- ii. The same study can be conducted at the secondary education level.
- iii. The same study can be conducted at the teacher education level.
- iv. The same study can be done by taking more independent variables.
- v. The same study can be carried out by taking some more psycho-sociological variables.
- vi. The same study can be carried out using Mental health-related variables.

Conclusion

Mental and physical health are interconnected. As Mahatma Gandhi said, 'If wealth is lost, nothing is lost. If health is lost, something is lost. If the character is lost, everything is lost. This study found that two-thirds of postgraduate students at NEHU have mental health issues. However, 36.8% of students were identified as mentally healthy.

Key findings:

- Gender: Male students were more likely to be mentally healthy than female students.
- Religion: Students from the Christian community were more likely to be mentally healthy than those from other communities.
- Tribal status: Tribal students were more likely to be mentally healthy than non-tribal students.
- Residence: Students from rural areas were more likely to be mentally healthy than urban students.
- Age: Students under 23 years old were more likely to be mentally healthy than those 24 years and older.

Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for mental health support services for postgraduate students at NEHU to promote their well-being, academic success, and overall quality of life.

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